Sonoran Solar Energy Project

Toward a Safe, Clean Energy Future: The Sonoran Solar Energy Project is the first-ever solar energy project approved on public lands in Arizona. The low-water-use photovoltaic plant will be built close to existing transmission lines.

VITALS

Location: Maricopa County, Arizona

Technology: Photovoltaic panels with 150 two-megawatt alternating-current arrays

Electricity production capacity: 300 megawatts

Company: Boulevard Associates, LLC, a subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources, LLC (Juno Beach, Florida).

BY THE NUMBERS -- the project is expected to:

- Provide 300 megawatts of clean electricity, enough power at capacity to serve 90,000 homes;
- Employ 358 workers during peak construction and 16 permanent employees when the plant is operational;
- Provide the Federal government $376,680 annually from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) rental fees and nearly $1.6 million annually in megawatt capacity fees once the project is fully online; and
- Be built on 2,013 acres of public land. BLM manages 12.2 million acres of public lands in Arizona, of which 3.4 million acres are managed for conservation and wilderness characteristics.

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ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND MITIGATION: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has worked with Federal, State and local partners, members of the environmental and conservation community, and interested stakeholders to advance environmentally sound projects.

- ✓ **Water:** BLM's selected alternative – the use of photovoltaic technology - will use just a fraction of the water originally proposed. The initial request for a concentrated solar plant would have required about 3,000 acre/feet a year. The alternative requires only 33 acre/feet a year.
- ✓ **Reduced Footprint:** The project, as approved, is much smaller – at 2,013 acres – than what was originally proposed (3,620 acres), helping to reduce ecological and visual impacts.
- ✓ **Wildlife:** Mitigation measures will lessen potential effects to wildlife that live or move through the area. The BLM is requiring that all burrowing owls on and near the project be relocated to suitable habitat on other BLM lands. Perimeter fencing will exclude large animals from the site, and wildlife culverts will allow animal movement through or around the project.
- ✓ **Air:** The use of photovoltaic technology means that there will be no emissions of criteria pollutants or plumes from the plant's operation. This is important to Maricopa County because the Environmental Protection Agency has determined it does not meet air pollution standards for particles and ozone.
- ✓ **Cultural**: The approval included consultation with the federally recognized Indian tribes and the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office.

A SMART, COLLABORATIVE PROCESS: In April of 2009 the BLM committed to helping the nation reach its clean energy future by guaranteeing coordinated, focused processing, full environmental analysis and public review for specific renewable e**n**ergy projects where the companies involved had demonstrated they were ready to advance to the formal environmental review and public participation process. In the past two years, Salazar has used this approach to approve 25 major renewable energy projects on public lands. When constructed, the projects are expected to nearly 12,000 construction and operational jobs and produce about 6,200 megawatts of energy, enough to power 2.2 million American homes. These projects include 15 commercial-scale solar energy facilities, three wind projects and seven geothermal plants.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS: In July 2009, the BLM invited 20 Federal, State, and local entities to participate in assessing project as cooperating agencies. The Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Department of Water Resources, Town of Buckeye, and the City of Goodyear all helped evaluate the project.

THE BIG PICTURE: The Sonoran Solar Energy Project is one of the projects that will help achieve the Administration and Interior initiative to make a rapid and responsible move to utility-scale production of renewable energy on public lands. The State of Arizona is working to achieve a requirement that by 2025, 15 percent of the electricity from state-regulated utilities is to come from renewable energy.